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Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

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GOP claims enough votes for tax bill

Key senators on fence persuaded to back it

By Marcy Gordon and Stephen Ohlemacher
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans steamed toward passage of a $1.4 trillion tax bill Friday, overcoming 11th-hour hitches in their drive to deliver a major legislative accomplishment to President Donald Trump by Christmas.

"We have the votes," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said after a closed-door meeting of Republican senators.

One prior holdout, Sen. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., announced that he would support the bill. Another, Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, said on Twitter she was "delighted" she'd won an agreement from leaders to add a $10,000 deduction for local property taxes and was considered all but certain to back the measure.

With the party controlling the Senate 52-48 and Democrats uniformly opposed, Republicans need 50 votes to win approval for the bill. Vice President Mike Pence would break a tie.

In a flurry of last-minute deal-

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Toomey helps small college
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Former national security adviser pleads guilty to making false statements to FBI

Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images

Michael Flynn, former national security adviser to President Donald Trump, leaves federal court Friday in Washington, D.C. Mr. Flynn pleaded guilty to lying about his contacts with Russia, escalating the FBI's investigation of possible collusion between the Trump campaign and Moscow.

Flynn to cooperate with Mueller probe

By Eric Ticker and Chad Day
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former national security adviser Michael Flynn pleaded guilty Friday to lying to the FBI, becoming the first Trump White House official to face criminal charges and admit guilt so far in the wide-ranging election investigation led by special counsel Robert Mueller.

Mr. Flynn also agreed to cooperate with Mr. Mueller's probe, which focuses on Russian meddling in the 2016 election and possible coordination between Russia and Donald Trump's campaign aimed at sending the Republican businessman to the White House.

According to court papers filed Friday in connection with the guilty plea, a "very senior transition official" directed Mr. Flynn to contact foreign governments, including Russia, about a U.N. resolution regarding Israeli settlements.

A member of Mr. Trump's transition team says Mr. Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, is the "very senior transition official" referenced in the court papers. The transition team official who confirmed the person as Mr. Kushner spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, since Mr. Kushner's name was not publicly revealed

The Associated Press also identified former Deputy National Security Adviser KT McFarland as an unnamed senior official referred to in the court papers.

She was involved in a discussion with Mr. Flynn about what he would say to Russian government officials in response to U.S. sanctions imposed on Russia last year. That's according to two former officials on Mr. Trump's transition team who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to publicly

SEE **FLYNN**, PAGE A-4

IUP plans to convene ad hoc group to decide fate of old books

By Bill Schackner
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The library system at Indiana University of Pennsylvania has 486,000 books, in disciplines ranging from physics to philosophy, English to engineering, but nearly half the collection hasn't been checked out in 20 years, the school says.

So a few years back, it laid the groundwork to remove up to 178,000 volumes and donate many of them. Sounded like a plan.

Only trouble is, not everybody at the state university agrees with the idea, or on which holdings ought to remain and which can go. A worn statistics manual or poetry collection that one patron considers a printed fossil — merely taking up space in the stacks — might be a scholarly find to another patron.

So amid continuing complaints and a petition drive, IUP this spring plans to convene an ad hoc group headed by its provost to review the process and decide the fate of volumes over which there may be disagreements.

Officials say "deaccessing" is a common practice among academic libraries, one that is necessary but has stirred complaints elsewhere, too. IUP had not done it in a

SEE **BOOKS**, PAGE A-3

Bob Donaldson/Post-Gazette

PLASTIC ICE Skaters take to the white plastic as they glide along the Carnegie Museum of Art's Hall of Sculpture Friday at the CMOA on Ice, a seasonal party at the museum.

Man 'would help anyone but couldn't help himself'

Voice on the reality of drug abuse silenced

By Rich Lord
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The day after his 14th overdose, Gary Thomas Fisher Jr. figured his romance with heroin, and her nightmare sister fentanyl, had to end soon, one way or another.

"I can't do it. My body hurts. My body hurts. I'm tired of the looks of disappointment," he said, as he sat on a back porch on Allentown's Excelsior Street on Aug. 4. "I don't know how much more my body can take."

Nearly four months later, on an unseasonably warm Thursday afternoon, the former ironworker and father of two — chronicled weeks ago in the special Pittsburgh Post-Gazette report Riding OD Road — was found dead in a house a block from his childhood home. He was 29.

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Riding OD Road
How an unassuming city neighborhood became the overdose capital of the region

Inside the high-stakes Santa operation at Century III Mall

Was the Black Friday photo taken that day?

By Julian Routh
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A viral photo has angered Santa Claus and his helpers.

So here they were Thursday, on the first floor of Century III Mall in West Mifflin, eager to set the record straight — and eager to tell the world that they're doing just fine operating their Santa photo booth in the desolate-looking shopping center.

It had only been a few days since an overhead photo of their operation spread rapidly on the internet in Pittsburgh. The photo — posted first on Century III Mall Memories, an independent Facebook page documenting the mall's history — purported to show the Santa booth on Black Friday, surrounded by empty space in an empty mall.

"Just heartbreaking," the caption read. "Santa earlier today on Black Friday, one of the busiest shopping days of the year. There were no lines to be seen. No children laughing or smiling. Not a single person in sight. Behind him, many empty storefronts are visible."

But according to Santa's crew, the photo is highly misleading — not even taken on Black Friday — and has caused more trouble than it was worth. The Post-Gazette spent time with Santa and his helpers on a weekday afternoon, getting a behind-the-scenes look at a once-a-year business that is both highly visible and necessarily secretive about the magic that lets Santa be in many places at once.

SEE **SANTA**, PAGE A-2

Weather
Mostly sunny.
Daytime high 51, tonight's low 34.
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